

# Victorian Age

**Queen Victoria** ruled the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for more than 63 years. The period of her reign, **from 1837 to 1901**, became known as the **Victorian Age**.

During the Victorian Age **Britain** became the **largest empire that had ever existed**. At its height, the British Empire covered about one-fifth of the Earth's land mass and Victoria ruled a quarter of the world's population. There were also **great changes and developments** within Britain in science and technology, culture, and daily life.



Picture 1. Queen Victoria  
([https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a1/Queen\\_Victoria\\_Golden\\_Jubilee\\_-\\_3a\\_cropped.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a1/Queen_Victoria_Golden_Jubilee_-_3a_cropped.JPG))

## Industry

The **Industrial Revolution** began in the **late 1700s**, when machines were invented to make products more easily. The full effects of this revolution only started to be seen during Victoria's reign. **Steam-powered machinery** meant that factories could **produce items more quickly and efficiently** than ever before. In particular, Britain became the **world leader in iron and steel production**. The country grew wealthy through international trade.

Steam power also led to dramatic **changes in public transportation**. When Victoria came to the throne, the **railroads** ran for only a few hundred kilometers. In the 1840s and early 1850s, 8,000 miles (13,000 kilometers) of railroads were built all over Britain, giving people the opportunity to **travel cheaply and easily** around the country.



Picture 2. The Great Exhibition  
(<https://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~media/bl/global/dl%20romantics%20and%20victorians/banner/s/great-exhibition---crop.jpg>)

Railroads also began to spread across other parts of the empire.

In **1851** the **Great Exhibition** was held in Hyde Park in London. This exhibition was intended to **demonstrate Britain's industrial, military, and economic achievements**. It also included many of the accomplishments pioneered by the British in its many colonies. The exhibition attracted visitors from all over the world.

## Age of Invention

The success of the steam engine and the other inventions that brought about the Industrial Revolution also led to many other new inventions. The Victorian era was one of great scientific and technological advances. In **1839 photography** was invented and

Victorians rushed to have their portraits taken. Queen Victoria herself was fascinated by the process of photography.

**Alexander Graham Bell** invented the **telephone** in **1876**. Bicycles became popular in the 1870s, and in **1872** a bicycle known as the **penny farthing** was introduced. This had a large wheel at the front and a smaller one at the back. The design was used until about 1880, when a bicycle with equal-sized wheels was developed. The **first cars** appeared after **1885**.



Picture 3. Man on the penny farthing  
([https://cdn20.pamono.com/p/g/1/3/1329735\\_ngdp6srbb0/foto-di-volpe-penny-farthing-bugle-1932-fotografia-in-bianco-e-nero-immagine-1.jpg](https://cdn20.pamono.com/p/g/1/3/1329735_ngdp6srbb0/foto-di-volpe-penny-farthing-bugle-1932-fotografia-in-bianco-e-nero-immagine-1.jpg))

Gas lighting brightened homes, public buildings, and the streets. **By 1879 Joseph Swan** had invented an **electric light bulb**. By the 1880s steam power was being used in power stations to make electricity.

There were developments in medicine and health care, too. The most important of these was pioneered by **Joseph Lister**. Lister investigated the causes of infection that occurred after patients had undergone surgery. He realized that the **infections were caused by bacteria**. In 1870 he introduced methods of **sterilizing** surgical instruments and using **antiseptics** to keep hospitals clean. These methods dramatically reduced infections and deaths.

**Charles Darwin** was another important scientist of the era. His ideas about **evolution** forever changed the way scientists thought about all living things.

## Culture

Many people in Victorian Britain wanted to **find out more about the world** around them. They went to lectures on science, history, religion, and exploration. In 1845 Parliament said that local councils could set up free libraries, and by the end of the era every large city had its own **art gallery, museum, and concert hall**.



Picture 4. Victorian seaside holidays  
([https://retrotrampling.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/117345\\_ses.jpg](https://retrotrampling.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/117345_ses.jpg))

Victoria and her husband Albert **encouraged the arts and literature**. Many great writers, including *Charles Dickens*, *the Brontë sisters*, and *Robert Louis Stevenson*, wrote during the Victorian Age. The great artistic movement of the age was the Pre-Raphaelites, which included artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Everett Millais.

The extension of the railroads meant that **travel was more affordable** than it had ever been, as well as quicker. By the 1840s the working classes joined the upper classes on **seaside holidays**. At the seaside, people stayed in boarding houses, paddled, and walked on pleasure piers.

# Victorian Life

In Britain in 1837, when Victoria came to the throne, the majority of people lived in villages and worked on the land. By the end of her reign most people **lived in towns and worked in offices**, shops, and factories. The **population** of Britain **more than doubled** in the Victorian era, creating a **huge demand for food, clothing, and housing**. Even more factories and machines were built to meet this demand, and new towns developed.

## Education

Most Victorian families were large and only the poorest families did not have servants. Children from **rich families** were taught at home by a **governess**. **Boys** were sent to **boarding school** around the age of 10. There were **few schools for girls** until the end of the Victorian era, so girls from wealthy families usually continued to be taught at home.

In early Victorian Britain most **poor children did not attend school**, so they grew up unable to read or write. Some went to free charity schools and Sunday schools, which were run by churches.

In **1844** Parliament passed a **law** stating that **children working in factories** must be given **six half-days of schooling every week**. In **1870** another law was passed that required all children **between the ages of five and 12 to attend school**. Many more schools were built as a result of this.

**Teachers** in Victorian schools were **strict** and they could **punish** children for not learning their lessons or for misbehaving. There could be as many as 70 or 80 students in each class. Lessons were usually reading and copying, or chanting a lesson until it had been memorized.

Paper was expensive so children wrote on **slates**. After a lesson was completed and the teacher had checked their work, students cleared their slates for the next lesson. Older children sometimes learned to write on paper using pens made out of thin wooden sticks dipped into ink. In many schools **pupil-teachers aged 13 and above helped with the teaching**. After five years they could become teachers themselves.



Picture 5. Victorian Age school  
([https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/files/2018/06/v\\_class\\_boys\\_rows.jpg](https://sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/files/2018/06/v_class_boys_rows.jpg))

## Children at Work

**Most poor children were sent out to work**, often for long hours and little pay. Small children were made to crawl underneath machinery or open and close the ventilation

doors in coal mines. Many children had accidents or became ill or died because these jobs were so dangerous.

Until the 1840s children as young as five worked in **underground mines for up to 12 hours a day**. The Factory Act of 1878 banned employment of children under the age of 10. However, poor families often still sent children out to work because they needed the money.

After **1842** the **employment of women and children in the mines was made illegal**. After **1844** working **hours were limited** for children and women in factories.

## End of an Era

By the time Queen Victoria died in 1901, **almost every area of life had changed dramatically**. The empire over which Victoria had presided would not last far into the 1900s. Within 15 years, World War I destroyed monarchies and empires all around the world. By the middle of the century there was very little left of the great British Empire.

**ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ON YOUR NOTEBOOK.** TRY TO MAKE THE ANSWERS AS COMPLETE AS POSSIBLE.

1. How long did Queen Victoria reign?
2. Was the British Empire big during her reign?
3. When did the Industrial Revolution begin?
4. Why was the use of steam power so important?
5. When and why was the Great Exhibition organized?
6. Name at least 2 inventions of the Victorian Age.
7. Where could Victorian people go to learn more about other cultures?
8. What was one of the consequences of affordable travels?
9. How were children from rich families educated?
10. What did poor children do?
11. What happened in 1844?
12. How were teachers in Victorian schools?
13. Where did children write their notes? Why?
14. How long did children work in mines during a day?
15. What happened in 1842 and 1844?